Position Statement on Kindergarten Entry Age

Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children (MiAEYC) believes there is no one right date for determining kindergarten eligibility. Any entry date is arbitrary and will result in a group of children whose birth dates span twelve months, as much as 20% of a five-year-old's lifespan. In addition, young children come to school with diverse abilities, interests, skills and prior experiences. Therefore, it is not possible to set one date for eligibility that will equalize all children's chances for success. Although the choice of a date may be arbitrary, it is the only fair, legal and ethical criterion to use. MiAEYC believes it is the responsibility of schools to meet the needs of all children as they enter kindergarten.

MiAEYC believes that there is no need to change Michigan's current kindergarten entry age of five on or before December 1.

- Changing the entry date will not solve teachers' concerns about the range of development in their classrooms.
  - There is always a group of children born in the last three months of any twelve-month period, so there is always a group of children who are the youngest regardless of the entry date.
  - A typical class of kindergarten children exhibits at least a two-year range in skills because children grow and develop at different rates.
- Changing the entry date will result in many at risk children waiting an additional year to be eligible for educational services and programs.
- The Michigan State Board of Education has described expectations[1] for children's learning as they enter kindergarten. These or other expectations should not be used to deny children the opportunity to attend kindergarten.
- Assessment at kindergarten entry should be used to identify supports and services needed to help children succeed. Children should receive instruction specific to their individual needs.
- Kindergarten curriculum needs to meet the needs of each child and ensure continuous progress in all areas of development (intellectual, language, social, emotional, and physical).
- Kindergarten teachers who have special training in early childhood education are prepared to provide appropriate programs for each child to be successful.
- Children are more likely to be successful in kindergarten if they have benefited from high quality pre-kindergarten programs and supportive families and communities.
- Parents are important partners in their children's education and should be able to choose the educational options that best meet their children's needs.

---

[1] Michigan Department of Education. (March 2005) *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten.* http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-5234_6809-103343--,00.html

Key Messages

- Age is the only fair criterion.
- Some children will always be the youngest.
- Schools must be ready for all children.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the issues around Michigan's kindergarten entry age of five on or before December 1?
    - Leaving the kindergarten entry age of five on or before December 1
        - Michigan families expect this.
        - Pre-kindergarten programs base their entry age on this date.
        - There is no research to support a different date as being better for the child.
        - By the time children are tested (in the 3rd grade) the developmental differences of children are not a factor.
        - Currently, Michigan students score higher on SATs and ACTs than other states.
    - Moving the kindergarten entry age of five on or before September 1
        - School districts would lose about 2% of their revenue for each of the next thirteen years as that class goes through the school system.
        - About one-quarter of the children eligible for pre-kindergarten programs would need to wait one whole year before accessing services. The at-risk children entering these programs need these services the most.
        - Michigan's children will be compared to children from other states on a more equal basis as most other states have a September 1 or close to it kindergarten entry age.
        - If the federal government requires national testing of K-2 grades, research suggests children with a September 1 entry date would score higher.

2. What does a "ready" school look like?

    For a variety of reasons[2] schools have pushed the curriculum and methodology of later elementary grades into kindergarten. This more academic approach is neither research-based nor best for young children. Developmentally, kindergarteners are transitioning from intuitive thinking to concrete process thinking.

    A school that can accept and meet the needs of all children:
    - Accepts all children who meet the legal chronological age of school entry.[3]
    - Offers a curriculum and academic standards based on research about young children's development and learning.
    - Recognizes that assessment is a process and includes a variety of tools, information and people.
    - Uses assessment tools and procedures for their intended purpose. (For example, if a tool used to diagnose developmental delays is part of the initial assessment process, the results will be used to plan appropriate learning strategies for the child and not used to keep the child out of kindergarten.)

---

[2] National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Department of Education. (2000) *Still unacceptable trends in kindergarten entry and placement.* Washington DC: NAEYC.

[3] National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998) *School Readiness: A position statement of the NAEYC.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

- Provides heterogeneous groupings so children can learn from each other. In a typical classroom there is a range of abilities, and the children will have positive peer role models from whom they can learn.
- Has smaller class sizes.
- Employs teachers who have training in early childhood education.
- Encourages and promotes high quality pre-kindergarten programs.

3. What's best for children?
We all want children to be successful in school and in life. There is consensus about the need for school readiness so children will be successful. But that readiness involves the child, the school, and the community (including the families).[4]
   - Ready children are healthy, can get along with others, follow three-step directions, and recognize the relationship between letters and sounds.
   - Ready schools have smaller classes, teachers trained in early childhood education, and a curriculum designed to meet all children's developmental needs.
   - Ready families include mothers with a high school education, a lower rate of child abuse and neglect, and families with financial, medical and social supports.
   - Ready communities offer services to help low-income families meet basic needs, high quality early care and education programs for working families, and affordable medical services.

4. How can we help children be successful in school and in life?
Children who have been nurtured and supported by caring adults in stimulating, literacy-rich environments during their pre-kindergarten years have the greatest likelihood of school success. All our children deserve these opportunities at home and in early care and education programs. In addition, developmentally appropriate kindergartens with reasonable curriculum expectations and specially trained early childhood teachers support children's school success and should be available for every child. These changes, although more complex than rolling back entry age, will make a significant difference.

Michigan Stories

Families have many stories about their children. In retrospect, everyone hopes they've made the right decision. These are stories about children known to Michigan AEYC members, with the names changed, of course.

Teachers often express concerns about fall birth date children. A family we know was concerned about their daughter, with a November 22 birth date, entering kindergarten at 4 3/4. The school thought she was ready, but the community norm was to wait. Laura started school in the fall when she was eligible, and was very successful early, learning to read and write well and socially very happy. The community put even more pressure on Laura's family two years later when her brother Darren, with a November 26 birth date, was eligible for kindergarten. Boys with fall birth dates were routinely encouraged to wait a year so that they would have an advantage in sports and academics. Darren did start kindergarten at 4 3/4, just as his sister had. He and his sister were both state-ranked swimmers in high school. Darren was a National Merit Finalist and received a scholarship from the University of Michigan, which he entered at 17 with sophomore-level credits.

---

[4] Rhode Island Kids Count. (2005) *Getting Ready: National school readiness indicators initiative a 17 state partnership.* Providence, RI: Rhode Island Kids Count. www.gettingready.org

An academically-oriented family in a middle-sized city decided to "redshirt" their fall birth date daughter because she just didn't seem interested in school-type activities. Susie started kindergarten the next fall and soon turned six, but still wasn't very interested in academic work, although she did well enough. She never excelled at academic school work, but more importantly, all of her social relationships were with children in the next grade. Although she was often uncomfortable socially with her classmates, Susie's social skills were actually very good; she was always more mature than the children in her own grade. This was most apparent in her freshman year in college. She just hated the freshman dorm, and was so uncomfortable that she threatened to drop out because the other students seemed so silly and unfocused to her. Finally she arranged to move to an upper class dorm and felt a part of the group. Susie was never the academic star her siblings were, although she graduated from college and has a good and satisfying career. In retrospect, waiting a year made no difference in her academic accomplishments, but made her "out of sync" with her classmates, and unhappy.

Bob was born in September, the youngest child in a two-parent middle class family. He had attended two years of preschool, and his mother worried he would be bored if he went a third year. Bob's preschool teacher indicated he was ready for school. She also considered his size because both his parents were tall, and he would be even bigger if he waited another year. Bob's friends were all going off to school, and he wanted to be with them. His parents enrolled him in kindergarten as one of the younger children in his class. Academically, he was a late reader, but is doing well in 7th grade (which he just completed as of this printing.)

Child Care Profile for Oakland County
Compiled by the Oakland County Child Care Council
April 2007

POPULATION STATISTICS (SEMCOG)

Number of residents	1,219,426
Number of children ages 0-4	80,367
Number of children ages 5 - 12	220,393
Number of households with children	162,413
Number of households without children	308,720
Number of households total	471,133
Number of households in poverty	25,201

CHILD CARE COSTS, FAMILY INCOMES

Average, annual fees paid, full-time care for an infant in a child care center	$10,400
Average, annual fees paid, full-time care for a 4 yr. old in a center	$8476
Care for an infant as % of median income in Oakland	17%
Median annual household income	$61,907
Average, annual DHS subsidy, full-time care for a 4 yr. old in a center	$6500
Average, annual DHS subsidy, full-time care for an infant in a child care center	$9880

CHILD CARE SUPPLY

Number of child care centers	597
Number of spaces in child care center	44,036
Number of family child care homes (includes group and family child care homes)	717
Number of spaces in regulated family/group child care	6572
Number of spaces in **regulated** child care in Oakland County	50,608
Number of DHS enrolled Aide and Relative Providers	1269

QUALITY IN CHILD CARE

Number of accredited child care centers	38
Percent of centers accredited	6%
Number of accredited family child care homes (includes group and family child care homes)	13
Percent of family homes accredited	1%

CHILD CARE REQUESTS by TYPE OF CARE

Requests for care, annually	2433
Percent requests for infant and toddler care	71%
Percent requests for pre-school care	35%
Percent requests for school age care	24%
Percent requests for special needs care	2%
Percent requests for full-time care	78%
Percent requests for part-time care	9%
Percent requests for before and after school care	12%
Percent requests for non traditional hours of care	23%

Percentages do not equal 100% due to the same referral covering multiple requests

CHILD CARE WORKFORCE

Average Number of child care providers working in regulated care settings (based upon capacity)	5000
Number of child care providers trained through 4C	487
Average annual income of a full-time child care provider	$23,920
Percentage of child care center staff receiving employee subsidized health and/or dental insurance	50%

Statewide Statistics that Impact Oakland County

• The state continues to reduce eligibility for child care subsidies at the same time that it is requiring that families receiving subsidies work more hours.

• Approximately 100 licensed child care programs leave the child care industry each month (1,316 in 2006). Child care providers cite the inability to cover the costs of providing care and making a good wage as reasons for leaving the field. The state has kept the reimbursements to providers stagnant for the last eleven years. (Payments to providers serving low-income families are based on the 1996 Child Care Market Rate Survey.)

• The licensing consultants charged with monitoring child care programs carry caseloads of over 200. As best practice, the National Association for the Education of Young Children suggests that the caseloads be 75 programs for each child care licensing consultant.

• While there is ample evidence that the quality of any care program is increased by the amount and quality of training and support that the providers receive, there is not enough free and low cost training available for all of the providers within the state.

• At a time of deficits in the state budgets, families and children should not have to forego services that will enhance their abilities to learn and work. The state needs a new way of raising revenues.

Child Care Council
OAKLAND COUNTY

2111 Cass Lake Road, Suite 104
Keego Harbor, MI 48320
Tel: 248-681-9192 • Fax: 248-738-6230

Testimony presented by Lesia Ferris-Bland, Sherry Scruggs and Betsy Spiker
May 8, 2007

- History of Oakland 4C

- Services offered by Oakland 4C
  - Resource and Referral
  - Training of child care professionals and parents
  - Collaboration with other human service agencies
  - Partnership with other companies
  - Community Outreach
    - Success By 6

- High Quality Child Care
  - Training and correlation to quality
  - Success rates … pay now or pay more later
  - Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Infant/Toddlers, Pre-Kindergarten and Model Standards for Out-of-Time Programs in Michigan
  - Accreditation

www.naeyc.org/ece/research/qualitystudy.asp
www.abtassoc.com/reports/ccqual.pdf

SUCCESS BY 6®

Helping all children succeed for life.

Oakland County Community Liaisons

The Success by 6 Community Liaisons partner with local social service agencies and act as a link between families with young children and services and programs available in the community. In addition, Liaisons can assist parents or childcare providers in completing the child development assessment tool - Ages and Stages Questionnaire. Please feel free to contact your Community Liaison for more information.

Here is a sample of what your Community Liaison Can do....

For Parents

- **Workshops** - on a variety of topics, such as: car seat safety, loving guidance, and activities to enjoy with children
- **Quality Child Care Criteria** - what to look for in a child care program that demonstrates quality
- **Needs assessment** - what community services might be beneficial for you and your family.

For Providers

- **On–site visits** - to your program to share materials and resources, offer support and answer questions or concerns
- **Networks** - Liaisons coordinate provider networks that meet to share challenges and successes, discover resources and enjoy social gatherings
- **Professional Development** - Liaisons can connect you to a variety of training opportunities

Call for more information - 248-681-9192
Or visit our website - www.oaklandchildcare.org

Susan Allen - Executive Director, Oakland County Child Care Council
Bridget Hanigan - North Oakland County Liaison
Anne Rosenthal - Southfield and Oak Park Liaison
Danelle Watts - Southeast Oakland County Liaison
Lesia Farris-Bland - Auburn Hills Liaison
Sherry Scruggs - Pontiac Liaison

United Way
United Way
for Southeastern Michigan

Child Care Council
OAKLAND COUNTY

STILL Unacceptable Trends in Kindergarten Entry and Placement

A position statement developed by the
National Association of Early Childhood Specialists
in
State Departments of Education

2000 Revision and Update

Endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children
March 2001

Introduction

The **National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE)** is a national organization of early childhood specialists who work in state education agencies. The goals of the organization are:

- to enhance the efforts of the State Departments of Education on behalf of young children;
- to strengthen communication and coordination among states;
- to influence and support policies and legislation that affect the education, health, and welfare of children and their families;
- to offer assistance and leadership in researching, analyzing, and recommending standards for quality early childhood and teacher preparation programs; and
- to promote communication and coordination between State Departments of Education and other agencies and professional organizations serving young children.

For several years, members of the association representing all sections of the country have observed with concern the persistence of practices which narrow the curriculum in kindergarten and primary education, constrict equal educational opportunity for some children, and curtail the exercise of professional responsibility of early childhood educators.

This position statement on entry and placement in kindergarten reflects those concerns. It is based upon current research as well as the experiences and expertise of **NAECS/SDE** members. **NAECS/SDE** offers this position paper in an effort to increase public awareness about educational policies and practices affecting young children. Our hope is that it will serve as a catalyst for change at local, state, and national levels.

Overview of Position Statement

For the last two decades the members of **NAECS/SDE** have continued to call attention to attitudes and practices which erode children's legal rights to enter public school and participate in a beneficial educational program. Dramatic changes in what children are expected to do upon entry and in kindergarten have resulted in well-intentioned interventions which are often inequitable, ineffective, and wasteful of limited public resources.

In 1987 the first edition of this position statement was published; it has been widely cited and continues to influence thinking. Unfortunately, the practices, which caused the members of the Association to become alarmed in the 1980's, continue—this in spite of a preponderance of evidence of their lack of benefit and even of harm to children. This update of the 1987 document has been prepared in response to requests from the membership and the early childhood field.

Classroom teachers continue to report that they have little or no part in decisions, which determine curriculum and instructional methodology. Instead, those decisions are made by administrators who are influenced by public demand for more stringent educational standards and the increased availability of commercial, standardized tests.

Additional pressure on kindergarten programs sometimes comes from primary teachers, who themselves face requirements for more effective instruction and higher pupil achievement. They argue that the kindergarten program should do more. In addition, a growing number of states and localities have raised the age of kindergarten eligibility, providing further evidence of changed expectations for kindergarten education and kindergarten children.

A number of highly questionable practices have resulted from the trend to demand more of kindergarten children. These practices include:
1) inappropriate uses of screening and readiness tests;
2) discouragement or outright denial of entrance for eligible children;
3) the development of segregated transitional classes for children deemed unready for the next traditional level of school; and
4) an increasing use of retention.

Two predominant considerations underlie these practices. The first is a drive to achieve homogeneity in instructional groupings. Some educators believe that instruction will be easier and more effective if the variability within the class is reduced. There is, however, no compelling evidence that children learn more or better in homogenous groupings. In fact, most of them learn more efficiently and achieve more satisfactory social/emotional development in mixed-ability groups.

The second is a well-intentioned effort to protect children from inappropriately high demands on their intellectual and affective abilities. When parents are counseled to delay a child's entry or when children are placed in "developmental" or "readiness" classes to prepare for kindergarten or "transitional" classes to prepare for first grade, it is often because the school program is perceived to be too difficult for some children. In this view, children must be made ready for the demands of the program, in contrast to tailoring the program to the strengths and needs of the children.

Delaying children's entry into school and/or segregating them into extra-year classes actually labels children as failures at the outset of their school experience. These practices are simply subtle forms of retention. Not only is there a preponderance of evidence that there is no academic benefit from retention in its many forms, but there also appear to be threats to the social-emotional development of the child subjected to such practices. The educational community can no longer afford to ignore the consequences of policies and practices which: 1) assign the burden of responsibility to the child, rather than the program; 2) place the child at risk of failure, apathy toward school, and demoralization; and 3) fail to contribute to quality early childhood education.

Therefore, NAECS/SDE calls for policymakers, educators, and all concerned about young children to use the summary principles and discussions which follow to guide and inform decisions about kindergarten entry and placement:

Summary of Principles for Kindergarten Entry and Placement by the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education

1. **Kindergarten teachers and administrators guard the integrity of effective, developmentally appropriate programs for young children . . .**
   . . . they do not yield to pressure for acceleration of narrowly focused skill-based curricula or the enforcement of academic standards derived without regard for what is known about young children's development and learning.

2. **Children are enrolled in kindergarten based on their legal right to enter . . .**
   . . . families are not counseled or pressured to delay entrance of their children for a year by keeping them at home or enrolling them in other programs. Rather, families are strongly encouraged to enroll age-eligible children.

3. **Kindergarten teachers and administrators are informed about assessment strategies and techniques and are involved responsibly in their use . . .**
   . . . they do not defer assessment decisions solely to psychometricians and test publishers.

4. **Retention is rejected as a viable option for young children . . .**
   . . . it is not perpetuated on the basis of false assumptions as to its educational benefit.

5. **Tests used at kindergarten entrance are valid, reliable, and helpful in initial planning and information-sharing with parents . . .**
   . . . they are not used to create barriers to school entry or to sort children into what are perceived to be homogeneous groups.

6. **All children are welcomed—as they are—into heterogeneous kindergarten settings . . .**
   . . . they are not segregated into extra-year programs prior to or following regular kindergarten.

Discussion of Principle 1

Kindergarten teachers and administrators guard the integrity of effective, developmentally appropriate programs for young children . . .
. . . they do not yield to pressure for acceleration of narrowly focused skill-based curricula or the enforcement of academic standards derived without regard for what is known about young children's development and learning.

Most of the questionable entry and placement practices that have emerged in recent years have their genesis in concerns over children's capacities to cope with an increasingly inappropriate curriculum in the kindergarten. External pressures in recent decades have so changed the focus of the curriculum in kindergarten that it is often difficult to distinguish between curriculum and methodology in classrooms for young children and those of later elementary grades.

Several factors have interacted to bring about those changes. Research about the capabilities of young children has been misrepresented and misunderstood. A popular belief has developed that children are smarter now primarily because of exposure to television and because so many go to preschool. A rather large number of overzealous parents have also contributed to the problem by insisting that their children be "taught" more and by expecting these children to learn to read in kindergarten. This parental view of kindergarten has reinforced the notion that didactic methods of teaching (many of questionable value even for older elementary children) should be accepted practice in kindergarten.

Too often teachers are told, or they believe, that it is not enough to set the stage for learning by preparing a rich and varied environment and encouraging children to engage in activities which carry their development forward. In too many kindergartens, the core of rich creative experiences with real materials has now been replaced with abstract curriculum materials requiring pencil-and-paper responses. Often these are linked to tightly sequenced and often inappropriate grade-level lists of expected skill acquisition in each of the subject areas. Ironically, children who are ready to learn to read are more likely to advance as far as they are able in an active learning classroom.

(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Goodlad & Anderson, 1987; Hills, 1987a; IRA & NAEYC, 1998; Kagan et al, 1995; Katz, 1991; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991; Shore, 1998; Shipman, 1987; Snow et al, 1998)

Discussion of Principle 2

Children are enrolled in kindergarten based on their legal right to enter . . .
. . . families are not counseled or pressured to delay entrance of their children for a year by keeping them at home or enrolling them in other programs. Rather, families are strongly encouraged to enroll age-eligible children.

Serious negative consequences accompany the rising trend to discourage parents from enrolling their age-eligible children in kindergarten. The dilemma is that the very children being counseled out of school are the ones who, if provided a flexible appropriate kindergarten curriculum, could benefit the most. The "gift of time" that many parents have been persuaded to give children by delaying school entry can result instead in denying them opportunities for cognitive growth through social interaction with their age-mates. It also implies that children have failed at school even before they begin. By the end of the primary level, children whose kindergarten entry is delayed do not perform better than peers who enter on time. Further, children who enter late are disproportionately represented in referrals to special education. This means their access to special help is also delayed a year.

Public schools cannot ethically select some children who are eligible under the law and reject others. Children subjected to delayed entry disproportionately represent racial and linguistic minorities, low-income children, and males. Denial of entrance to school, blatant or subtle, increases the disparity between social classes and could be construed as a denial of a child's civil rights. It places the financial burden for alternative schooling on parents. This is an equity problem.

Curiously, states with quite different entry cutoff dates perceive the same problems. While there is some evidence that older children tend to do better initially, the differences due to age are small and disappear with time. The specific entry date is irrelevant and recent legislative action in several states to raise the entry age will not accomplish what is intended. The quality and appropriateness of the kindergarten curriculum should be the focus of the reform. Age is the only non-discriminatory entry criterion.

No matter where the kindergarten entry date is set, there will always be a younger group of children within a given classroom. It is both unfair and unreasonable to establish expectations for achievement on what the oldest children can do. Delaying entry has been shown to contribute to greater variation among children in the same class—in chronological age, size, motor ability, experiential backgrounds, and other learning
characteristics.

Educators should be sensitive to and respectful of the wishes of some parents to postpone their children's initiation into the larger world of school. However, school personnel also have the responsibility to assure that parents do not make this decision based on anxiety over the suitability of the kindergarten program for their child. Educators have an important role to play in educating parents about the myths associated with perceived benefits of holding children out of school.

(Bellissimo et al, 1995; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Katz, 1991; Graue, 1993; Meisels, 1992; NAEYC, 1995; Shipman, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1985; Shore, 1998; Smith & Shepard, 1987; Spitzer et al, 1995; West et al, 1993)

Discussion of Principle 3

Kindergarten teachers and administrators are informed about assessment strategies and techniques and are involved responsibly in their use . . .
. . . they do not defer assessment decisions solely to psychometricians and test publishers.

Assessment is a process of determining whether particular characteristics are present in an individual or a program and the amount or extent of them. Standardized tests are one form of measurement. Assessment can also be accomplished through teacher observation, checklists, rating scales, and questionnaires.

Because testing is so prevalent, many teachers are faced with challenges for which their training and experience have left them unprepared. Today's early childhood educators must be able to: 1) recommend appropriate measures to be

used in the beginning of school years; 2) interpret and use the information which the measures produce; 3) communicate to other educators and parents what test information means about student progress; and 4) prevent and/or correct misuses of testing.

To fulfill these responsibilities requires that early childhood educators become informed about the functions of tests and measures, their properties, and the legitimate uses of test data. Tests, which fit one purpose adequately, may be totally unsuited to another. Most importantly, early educators must know about the various forms of assessment, which can
supplement or replace test scores.

Further, as children enrolling in school represent more diverse language and culture, new assessment responsibilities are placed upon educators at every level. *"For the optimal development and learning of all children, educators must accept the legitimacy of children's home language, respect and value the home culture, and promote and encourage the active support of all families."* (**NAEYC**, 1995, p.2)

As tests have increased in popularity, instances of their abuse have increased. Abuses occur when:

- Assessment tools are used for purposes for which they were not designed (e.g., screening tests used to diagnose a child's development);
- Assessment tools do not meet acceptable levels of quality (e.g., no reliability or validity studies are available);
- An assessment tool is used as the sole basis for a decision about placing a child in a specific educational program;
- An assessment tool is used as the sole basis for a decision about placing a child in a specific educational program;
- An assessment tool or test determines curricular objectives;
- Test scores are used as a single measure of school and/or teacher effectiveness; and
- Teachers lack sufficient training and experience in the use of assessments.

(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Hills, 1987b; Meisels, 1987; NAEYC, 1987; NAEYC, 1995; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991; NEGP, 1998; Shepard, 1994; Shepard et al, 1998; Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, 1935)

Discussion of Principle 4

Retention is rejected as a viable option for young children . . .
. . . it is not perpetuated on the basis of false assumptions as to its educational benefit.

Retention policies should be highly suspect given the lack of demonstrated effectiveness and prevalent bias against certain groups of children. The current methodology used in selecting students for retention makes it impossible to predict accurately who will benefit. Pro-retention policies as a strategy for establishing rigorous academic standards are likely to be self-defeating. Lowered expectations developed by parents and teachers actually decrease the probability that retained children will attain their potential.

Although research does not support the practice of grade retention, many educators and parents do. It is true that teachers see children they have retained making progress. It is also true they have no opportunity to see how well the children might have progressed had they been promoted.

The vast majority of control-group studies, which are structured to measure this comparison, come down clearly on the side of promotion. Students recommended for retention but advanced to the next level end up doing as well as or better academically than non-promoted peers. Children who have been retained demonstrate more social regression, display more behavior problems, suffer stress in connection with being retained, and more frequently leave high school without graduating.

The term "ending social promotion" creates a climate that supports an increase in the practice of retaining children. Most schools are not employing less costly strategies that are proven to support children's achievement, thus avoiding social promotion. These include:

* high quality preschool;
* improving the quality of child-care settings;
* full-time kindergarten;
* lowered class-size;
* tutoring outside of class time;
* summer programs;
* after-school programs; and
* multiage grouping.

Ending conditions, which prevent all children from maximum learning, must be a priority for us all.

(CPRE, 1990; Cosden et al, 1993; MBE, 1990; Goodlad & Anderson, 1987; May & Welch, 1984; Meisels, 1992; Norton, 1983; Plummer, et al., 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Smith & Shepard, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1990; USDE, 1999)

Discussion of Principle 5

Tests used at kindergarten entrance are valid, reliable, and helpful in initial planning and information-sharing with parents . . .

. . . they are not used to create barriers to school entry or to sort children into what are perceived to be homogeneous groups.

Kindergarten testing is a common practice in today's public schools. Unfortunately, screening and readiness tests are being used interchangeably to determine the educational fate of many young children before they enter kindergarten. Developmental screening tests broadly and briefly tap developmental domains and are designed primarily to predict future school success—screening to find children who, after further assessment, appear to be good candidates for selective programs. As such, they must contain predictive validity as well as the accepted standards for all tests of reliability, validity, sensitivity, and specificity. Screening procedures should include vision, hearing, and health assessments.

Readiness tests, by definition and statistical design, do not predict outcomes and therefore cannot be substituted for such purposes. These tests assist teachers in making instructional decisions about individual children. Children who do poorly on readiness tests are likely to benefit the most from the kindergarten. The paradox is that if readiness tests are substituted for developmental screening measures, certain children are being channeled away from the regular classroom.

Testing children who have home languages other than English creates unique challenges. Care must be take to use instruments and processes, which clearly identify what the child knows, and is able to do both in English and in the home language. It is not appropriate to make assumptions about proficiency in the home language based on level of proficiency in English. Careful assessment may reveal that the child could benefit from additional home-language development.

A major problem with kindergarten tests is that relatively few meet acceptable standards of reliability and validity. Based on several widely used tests, the probability of a child being misplaced is fifty percent—the same odds as flipping a coin. The burden of proof is on educational and testing professions to justify the decisions they make in the selection or creation of screening instruments. Otherwise, educators are left speculating about what the results mean. Flawed results lead to flawed decisions, wasted tax dollars, and misdiagnosed children.

Even when credible, appropriate tests are selected, kindergarten screening and developmental assessment are still uncertain undertakings because:

- Normal behavior of young children is highly variable.
- Young children are unsophisticated in generalizing from one situation to another and are novices in testing behaviors.
- Young children may not be able to demonstrate what they know and can do clearly because of difficulties in reading, writing, responding, and in using pencils or other markers, or certain abstract symbols.
- Young children may not be able to demonstrate what they know and can do clearly because of differences in language and culture.
- Separation anxiety, the time of day the test is administered, and rapport with the examiner can all distort results, especially with young children.

Parents have a unique perspective about their child's development and learning history. For this reason, their knowledge about the behavior and attainments of their children is invaluable to teachers. Any full assessment of a child's progress must take the parent's information into account. Moreover, parents have a moral and legal right to be informed about the basis for educational decisions affecting their children.

Children entering school come from markedly different backgrounds. Assessment procedures must not penalize children at school entry for responses that have heretofore been appropriate for them or which they have not yet had a chance to develop. Screening and assessment does not substitute for an observant, competent, caring teacher and a responsive curriculum.

(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Hargett, 1998; Hills, 1987b; Meisels, 1987; NAEYC, 1987; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991; NEGP, 1998; Shepard, 1994; Shepard et al, 1998)

Discussion of Principle 6

All children are welcomed—as they are—into heterogeneous kindergarten settings . . .
. . . they are not segregated into extra-year programs prior to or following regular kindergarten.

The responsibility of the school is to accept children with the language, aptitudes, skills, and interests they bring. The function of the schools is to support the child's development and learning in all areas. The expectation is not that all children enter only with specific prerequisite skills.

The dramatic growth of extra-year programs represents an attempt by the educational system to cope with an escalating kindergarten curriculum and the varied backgrounds of entering children. However, these programs often increase the risk of failure for children who come to school with the educational odds against them. Selection and placement in "transitional," "developmental," or "readiness" classes often brand the children as failures in their own eyes and those of parents, peers, and teachers.

Children placed in segregated programs often encounter lowered expectations, have fewer positive peer role models for success and confidence, and lack access to regular curriculum. For all of these reasons, their future progress tends to be more limited and many of them continue in the slow track throughout their schooling.

"Regardless of what language children speak, they still develop and learn. Educators recognize that linguistically and culturally diverse children come to early childhood programs with previously acquired knowledge and learning based on the language used in their home. For young children the language of the home is the language they have used since birth, the language they use to make and establish meaningful communicative relationships, and the language they use to begin to construct their knowledge and test their learning." (**NAEYC**, 1995, p. 1)

Heterogeneous class groupings are more likely than are homogenous ones to encourage growth among children who come with home languages other than English or who are developing more slowly. Experiences within the regular classroom should be organized so that differences among children are valued rather than being viewed as a barrier to effective instruction. Flexible peer groupings, multiage and ungraded structures, and cooperative learning are some alternatives that can foster learning and self-esteem by valuing the gifts and talents of all children.

(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Goodlad & Anderson, 1987; Gredler, 1984; Katz et al, 1990; May & Welch, 1984; Meisels, 1992; Nye et al, 1994; Oakes, 1985; Robinson, 1990; Robinson & Wittebols, 1986; Shepard & Smith, 1990; Slavin, 1986)

A Call to Action

The primary consideration should be what is best for young children, not institutions, politicians, or professionals. Children do not benefit from retention or delayed entry or extra-year classes. The case has been made that children are placed in double jeopardy when they are denied, on highly questionable premises, the same educational opportunities as their peers.

Belief in the pure maturational viewpoint underlies many of the deleterious practices described in this paper. The adult belief that children unfold on an immutable timetable, however appealing, cannot be over-generalized to intellectual, social, linguistic, and emotional development. A responsive, success-oriented kindergarten curriculum and a well-trained teacher are bound to have a powerful effect on young children's learning. Children come to school as competent, naturally motivated learners. One of the school's critical responsibilities is to ensure that these characteristics are maintained and strengthened, not destroyed.

The issue is not whether to keep children with age-mates (Heterogeneous multiage grouping can stimulate and support children's development.) It is whether we can continue to uphold practices and program predicated on failure. Failure by any name does not foster success for any students.

What adjustments do schools need in order to make education more responsive to the needs of young children? Reducing class size, making the curriculum less abstract and therefore more related to children's conceptual development, insisting that only the most appropriately trained, competent, child-oriented teachers are placed in kindergarten programs, and assuring every child access to a high quality prekindergarten program are among better means to achieving the educational goal of success for all students.

Limited federal, state, and local resources are being used inappropriately as a result of well-intentioned but misdirected policies. However, simply to stop retention and extra-year classes will not assure success for all children. **NAECS/SDE** recommends that attention and resources be diverted from ineffective policies/and directed toward seeking long-term lasting cures for the ills of the kindergarten/primary curriculum.

A consensus is needed among the educational community and families that only those practices beneficial to young children will be permitted. We can have equitable, excellent, and economical public education for all of the nation's kindergarten children.

References

Andersen, S. (1993). The trouble with testing. American School Board Journal, 180(6), 24-26.

Bellisimo, Y., Sacks, C.H & Mergendoller, J.R. (1995). Changes over time in kindergarten holding out: Parent and school contexts. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 10(2), 205-222.

Bredekamp, S. & Copple, C. (Eds.). (1997). Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Center for Policy Research in Education, Rutgers University. (1990). Repeating grades in school: Current practice and research evidence. New Brunswick, NJ: Author.

Cosden, M., Zimmer, & Tuss, P. (1993). The impact of age, sex and ethnicity on kindergarten entry and retention decisions. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 15(2), 209-222.

Goodlad, J.I. & Anderson, H. (1987). The nongraded elementary school. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Graue, M.E. (1993). Ready for what?: Constructing meanings of readiness for kindergarten. Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Graue, M.E. & DiPerna, J. (2000). Redshirting and early retention: Who gets the "gift of time" and what are its outcomes? American Educational Research Journal. In Press.

Gredler, G.R. (October, 1984). Transition classes: A viable alternative for the at-risk child? Psychology in the Schools, 21, 463-470.

Hancock, C.R. (1994). Alternative assessment and second language study: What and why? ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics.

Hargett, G.R. (1998). Assessment in ESL and bilingual education: A hot topics paper. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Hills, T.W. (September, 1987). Children in the fast lane: Implications for early childhood policy and practice. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 2(3), 265-273.

Hills, T.W. (1987b). Screening for school entry. ERIC Digest. 18(4), 1-5.

Horm-Wingard, D.M., Winter, P.C., & Plofchan. (2000). Primary level assessment for IASA Title 1: A call for discussion. Prepared with the State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards Comprehensive Assessment Systems for IASA Title 1 Study Group on Early Childhood Assessment. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children. Young Children, 53, 30-46.

Kagan, S.L., Moore, E. & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.). (1995). Reconsidering children's early development and learning: Toward common views and vocabulary. Goal 1 Technical Planning Group Report 95-03. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Katz, L.G. (1991). Readiness: Children and schools. ERIC Digest EDO-PS-91-4. Champaign-Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Katz, L.G., Evangelou, D. & Hartman, J.A. (1990). The case for mixed-age grouping in early childhood education programs. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Massachusetts Board of Education. (1990). Structuring Schools for success: A focus on grade retention. MA: Author.

May, D.C. & Welch, E.L. (1984). The effects of developmental placement and early retention on children's later scores on standardized tests. Psychology in the Schools, 21, 381-385.

Meisels, S.J. (1992). Doing harm by doing good: Iatrogenic effects of early childhood enrollment and promotion policies. Early Childhood Research Quarterly. 7(2), 155-175.

Meisels, S.J. (January, 1987). Uses and abuses of developmental screening and school readiness testing. Young Children. 42(2), 4-6, 68-73.

National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (1987). Unacceptable trends in kindergarten entry and placement. Author.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1995). NAEYC Position statement on school readiness. Young Children, 46(1).

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1987). Position statement on standardized testing of young children 3 through 8 years of age. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1995). Responding to linguistic and cultural diversity: Recommendations for effective early childhood education. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. (1991). Guidelines for appropriate curriculum content and assessment in programs serving children ages 3 through 8. Young Children, 46, 21-38.

Norton, S.M. (1983). It's time to get tough on student promotion – Or is it? Contemporary Education, 54(4), 283-286.

Nye, B.A., Boyd-Zaharias, J. & Fulton, B.D. (1994). The lasting benefits study: A continuing analysis of the effect of small class size in kindergarten through third grade on student achievement test scores in subsequent grade levels—seventh grade (1992-83), technical report. Nashville: Center of Excellence for Research in Basic Skills. Tennessee State University.

Oakes, J. (1985). Keeping track: How schools structure inequality. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press.

Plummer, D.L., Liniberger, M.H., & Graziano, W.G. (1987). The academic and social consequences of grade retention: A convergent analysis. Current Topics in Early Childhood Education, Vol. VI. Katz, Ed. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Robinson, G.E. (1990). Synthesis of research on class size. Educational Leadership, 47(7), 80-90.

Robinson, G. & Wittebols, J. (1986). Class size research: A related cluster analysis for decision-making. Educational Research Service, Arlington, VA.

Shepard, L.A. (1994). The challenges of assessing young children appropriately. Phi Delta Kappan. 76: 206-13.

Shepard, L.A., Kagan, S.L. & Wurtz, E. (Eds.). (1998). Principles and recommendations for early childhood assessments. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (Eds.). (1989). Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention. London: Falmer Press.

Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1990). Synthesis of research on grade retention. Educational Leadership, 47(8), 84-88.

Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (November, 1986). Synthesis of research on school readiness and kindergarten retention. Educational Leadership. 44(3), 78-86.

Shipman, V.C. (January, 1987). Basic abilities needed as a precondition for school. Paper presented for the Conference on the Assessment of Readiness sponsored by the Center for Education Studies in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

Shore, R. (1998). Ready schools. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Slavin, R. (Ed.) (1986). Ability grouping and student achievement in elementary schools: A best-evidence synthesis. The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, Report No. 1., Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University.

Smith, M.L. & Shepard, L.A. (October, 1987). What doesn't work: Explaining policies of retention in the early grades. Phi Delta Kappan. 69(2), 129-134.

Snow, C.E. Perspectives on second-language development: Implications for bilingual education. Educational Researcher, 21(2), 16-19.

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S. & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Spitzer, S., Cupp, R. & Parke, R.D. (1995). School entrance age, social acceptance, and self-perceptions in kindergarten and 1st grade. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 10(4), 433-450.

Standards for educational and psychological testing. (1985). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, American Educational Research Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education.

US Department of Education. (1999). Taking Responsibility for Ending Social Promotion: A guide for educators and state and local leaders. Washington, DC: Author.

West, J., Hauskin, E.G. & Collins, M. (1993). Readiness for kindergarten: Parent and teacher beliefs. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.